A Poem of Wanting (with Lauren Bacall)

for S. S.

My body against a wall
(Bacall in a still: nerves
prompting the low chin, the look)
this awareness of verticals
he asked three adjectives—explain

(Lauren capturing her millionaire on screen
an accident
satisfying avarice)

the colour red, explain
this smooth kiss, this wine glass,
explain the breath of history

in traces of frescoes
at Pompeii, the rasping throat
of desire.

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Last night I dreamed of want,
dreamed lack
and Bacall’s voice, her posture
leaning against the piano, almost singing.
Dreamed waste
and the phases of the moon.

(Dreamed Bogey beside her, scratching
at his chest
to let the devil out at the end.)

Dreamed International Klein Blue,
the body a brush, brushing you: the canvas,
your torso a monotype
a painterly bruise.

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Let me address you directly, reader.
This movement beneath this shirt, dislodging
this garment, is becoming
a shoulder,

this dance between us
becoming the parallel drop of chords
Debussy’s harmonies sinking together
and pressing into this mattress
(I always

wore pyjamas, she wrote: her own aside)

a debt to the—o—
sudden lack of the language of
alphabets. The indentation of this moment

ripples across the surface
of the world, lento—o—
lentissimo.